

Homes and Neighbourhoods

Islington Council

222 Upper Street N1 1XR

**Report of: Rebecca Nicholson Head of Integrated Services and Ian Swift
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Meeting of: Housing Scrutiny Committee

Date: 13th March 2023

Damp, condensation, and mould programme

Progress Report February 2023

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. This report aims to provide the Housing Scrutiny Committee with information and progress made to date on the damp, condensation and mould programme that was established in November 2022.
- 1.2. Officers encourage the Housing Scrutiny Committee to appraise this work and make suggestions of how the council's work in this critical area can be improved.

2. Synopsis

- 2.1. This report details the context of damp and mould in Islington and the wider statutory frameworks we are working within.

- 2.2. It also outlines the broader engagement activity with residents and partners to strengthen communication and transparency, and to ensure accountability and improve the quality of services provided to residents.
- 2.3. As part of the council's commitment to be transparent the report details the 2021/2022 cases where the Housing Ombudsman found maladministration in the complaints for damp and mould, which led to a special investigation into our handling of damp and mould complaints.
- 2.4. A programme overview is provided and describes the approach, activity to date, learning and challenges, a section on upcoming work is also included. The overview includes:
- Background
 - Encourage our tenants to raise concerns
 - Learning from complaints to ensure we place the residents at the heart of the service provision, and we provide a service to every resident as if this service were being provided to an important member of our own family
 - Islington's damp and mould five-point plan
 - Strategic and operational response
 - Urgent response
 - Tenancy and property audit
 - Taskforce casework board
 - Alternative housing provision for tenants living with damp and mould in their homes
 - Housing Ombudsman investigation
 - Partnership work and whole systems approach
 - Draft Housing Allocations Policy
 - Communication and engagement strategies with residents
 - Training
 - Data-led and using technology to support approach
 - Benchmarking and sharing good practice
 - Service demand and investment
 - Improvement works and installations
 - Challenges
 - Upcoming activity
 - Conclusion

3. Background

- 3.1. The fundamental role of Islington Council is to provide tenants with safe homes to live in. This includes effectively and promptly resolving issues in homes which pose a danger to health and wellbeing, including damp and/ or mould. If damp and mould are left untreated for long periods, health problems can be serious or, in extreme cases, fatal.

Most social homes in Islington are of good quality: almost 7 out of ten tenants say they are happy with the homes and services Islington Council provides. But where issues with damp or mould do arise, it is imperative that they are taken seriously. Islington Council want to make sure we understand the prevalence of these issues across our stock and take steps to resolve the root cause of the problem and prevent it occurring again as far as possible. This report provides an overview how we are dealing with damp and mould in a way which is proactive, understanding of our tenants' experiences, and most importantly effective in resolving the underlying issue.

- 3.2. The best way for Islington Council to prevent problems with damp and mould developing and potentially harming tenants' wellbeing is to take a proactive approach to identifying any issues across their stock. Islington Council will draw insight from as many sources as possible to identify instances of damp and mould and the causes. This may involve looking beyond stock condition or stock investment surveys as a sole mechanism for identifying issues not reported by tenants. For example, as part of an annual home visit programme, Islington Council will check annually for damp and mould in all rooms, and it is a good opportunity to talk to our tenants and ask about any specific concerns they may have.
- 3.3. **Encourage our tenants to raise concerns**
 - 3.3.1. Alongside proactive work from staff, Islington Council will encourage our tenants to report problems as soon as possible. Islington Council will share information with tenants explaining the risks of living in a home with damp and mould, how to identify and report these issues, what steps Islington Council will take when reported and when it will be completed. Islington Council will have a simple way for tenants to report damp and mould problems and to complain if they are not satisfied with our response.
 - 3.3.2. Islington Council will also ensure our communications reach as many tenants as possible. Complaint procedures will be clearly explained to our tenants and details for the Housing Ombudsman Services will be added in our tenant communications. This will require a combination of a range of communication methods, such as: emails/ texts directly to tenants; leaflets and resident newsletters; information at community events or drop-in sessions, videos on digital channels, and social media as well as translation services where required. However, a significant barrier can be lack of trust; if tenants have reported issues or experienced delays in repairs previously, they may not trust that any future problems they report will be dealt with effectively. In such cases Islington Council can only rebuild trust by delivering a good service and resolving issues like damp and mould quickly and effectively. Islington Council will not be complacent.
 - 3.3.3. Islington Council will respond to instances of damp and mould promptly, with compassion for the impact on tenants' wellbeing, and with a focus on dealing with the issue and preventing it from reoccurring.

3.4. Learning from complaints

- 3.4.1. Islington Council will ensure we learn from complaints and other sources of resident feedback, to continually improve our performance. This is particularly important for issues like damp and mould where problems are likely to reappear if not appropriately resolved. Islington Council will ensure we have a rolling process to review complaints, assess what went wrong, and as a result make changes where needed to policies, procedures, and staff behaviour.
- 3.5. Islington Council is a landlord to over 36,000 Islington households, managing over 25,200 tenanted and 10,000 leaseholder properties, with 700 freeholder properties, with estimates that over 40% are sub-let.
- 3.6. Our stock condition varies with buildings that predate 1920. There was a growth of building construction post the Second World War and into the early 1980's.
- 3.7. We have new build schemes. and cyclical and major work programmes on estates, "The council carries out an assessment on each estate block every seven to ten years to understand what works will need to be done to ensure that the external and communal areas of the building remain in good order. This work could include repairs or replacements of roofs, windows, brickwork, and external and communal decorations."¹
- 3.8. As a landlord to over 40% of Islington's population who live in social housing, we know that in some of our properties damp and mould is present and, in many cases, a recurring issue that we need to tackle with a zero-tolerance approach to interventions.
- 3.9. The council also has an important statutory and strategic duty to work in partnership with Registered Social Landlords who also own over 17,000 properties in Islington and many of these properties due to the age, design etc also suffer from Damp and Mould.
- 3.10. Between January 2020 and December 2022 3,563 Islington Council properties have made one or more reports of damp and mould. This represents 14% of Islington Council's managed properties considerably higher than the 3% reported for all social housing in England.
- 3.11. In the Housing Ombudsman's 2021 Spotlight report: damp and mould – it is not lifestyle² states that in the English Housing Survey 2019 to 2020: headline report "Social housing compared to the private rented sector: According to the 2019-20 English Housing Survey, serious condensation and mould problems were present in at least one room in

¹ <https://www.islington.gov.uk/housing/repairs-and-estate-management/major-works-and-improvements/improvement-works>

² <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Spotlight-report-Damp-and-mould-final.pdf>

133,000 (3%) social sector homes and 192,000 (5%) of homes lacked thermal comfort. Homes built between 1981 and 1990 were most likely to fail the decent homes standard for thermal comfort. Although damp and mould are not specifically mentioned in relation to private rented sector (PRS) properties, the survey does note that the PRS had the highest proportion of non-decent homes (23%, 1.1 million). In comparison, the social housing sector had the lowest proportion of non-decent homes (12%, 504,000).”

- 3.12. In response to the Housing Ombudsman spotlight report we produced a project summary report. (Appendix 1)
- 3.13. About one in 20 homes let by social landlords in England have damp and mould problems, [a study by the Regulator of Social Housing reveals](#).
- 3.14. However, some landlords could strengthen their approach. The regulator estimates that less than 0.2% of social housing has major damp and mould problems, 1-2% contains serious problems, and a further 3-4% has ‘notable damp and mould’.
- 3.15. According to the regulator: “The vast majority of people living in social housing have homes that are free from damp and mould. However, living with damp and mould can have a serious impact on tenants’ health and wellbeing.”
- 3.16. [A separate study by the Housing Ombudsman](#) found that just 35% of social landlords in England have damp and mould policies, including processes for identifying and responding to reports from tenants. A further 12% said they were in the process of implementing one.
- 3.17. The ombudsman recorded a 77% rise in the number of enquiries and complaints it received from residents about damp and mould in 2021/22, taking the figure to 3,530. To date, there have been 3,969 enquiries and complaints this year.
- 3.18. Furthermore, the housing department in Islington Council outlined in their Housing Strategy: A home for all 2021-2026 “Our strategic programmes set out to tackle damp problems and improve the energy efficiency of our buildings.”³
- 3.19. The council is also preparing for the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill⁴ which will enact a set of measures to improve standards for people living in social housing. It sets out a new regulatory framework for the consumer regulation of social housing to strengthen the accountability of landlords for providing safe homes, quality services and treating residents with respect. The Housing Scrutiny Committee considered the Tenancy

³ https://www.islington.gov.uk/~/_media/sharepoint-lists/public-records/housing/publicity/publicconsultation/20202021/20210310drafthousingstrategyahomeforall1.pdf

⁴ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3177>

Satisfaction Measures which will be introduced by the Regulator of Social Housing at the February 2023 Housing Scrutiny Committee meeting. The 13th of March Housing Scrutiny Committee will also consider a report on the Regulation of Social Housing.

- 3.20. On 17th November 2020, the Charter for Social Housing Residents: social housing white paper⁵ was published and updated in 22nd January 2021, which “sets out the actions the Government will take to ensure that residents in social housing are safe, are listened to, live in good quality homes, and have access to redress when things go wrong...[and] what every social housing resident should be able to expect”.

The key themes of the paper are:

- **To be safe in your home.** We will work with industry and landlords to ensure every home is safe and secure.
- **To know how your landlord is performing,** including on repairs, complaints, and safety, and how it spends its money, so you can hold it to account.
- **To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly,** with access to a strong ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed.
- **To be treated with respect,** backed by a strong consumer regulator, and improved consumer standards for tenants.
- **To have your voice heard by your landlord,** for example through regular meetings, scrutiny panels or being on its board. The Government will provide access to help, if you want it, for you to learn new skills to ensure your landlord listens.
- **To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in,** with your landlord keeping your home in good repair.
- **To be supported to take your first step to ownership,** so it is a ladder to other opportunities, should your circumstances allow.

The Government will “work with the Regulator of Social Housing (“the regulator”) to create a strong, proactive consumer regulatory regime” and “requires that social rented homes are maintained by landlords to at least the quality set out by the Government’s Decent Homes Standard.”

- 3.21. The Decent Homes Standard⁶ was updated in 2006 to reflect the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The definition of a decent home is to meet the following:

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper>

- It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing
- It is in a reasonable state of repair
- It has modern facilities and services
- It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

3.22. What is damp, condensation and mould

3.22.1. Damp is excessive water in properties the source can vary but excess water can lead to damage to the property and risk of harm to the residents. Condensation is water droplets from moisture laden air forming on cold surfaces. Mould forms in persistently wet environments either from leaks or condensation it forms dark or multi-coloured spots and sometimes mushrooms. Mould sheds spores to reproduce and these can be harmful to health where there are excessive concentrations.

3.22.2. Examples of root causes of damp, condensation, and mould

- A repair – Internal or external leaks accelerates damp and mould issues
- Building design - Cold bridging and lack of insulation.
- Service failure - demands of service, process gaps or difficulty resolving root cause of damp, turnover of staff, lack of ownership.
- Overcrowding e.g. Lack of space and high levels of respiration
- Cost of living and fuel poverty e.g. Inability to afford to adequately heat the home leading to lots of cold surfaces for condensation to form.
- Poor thermal efficiency.
- Inadequate ventilation e.g., Property does not have adequate ventilation or tenant is unable to manage ventilation due to disability, mental health or capacity, or security fears and cost.

3.23. In 2022/2023 the council also engaged in wider resident and partnership activity including:

3.23.1. **Creating a Tenants Charter (Appendix 2) and Tenant Empowerment framework (Appendix 3)** that will help address damp and mould through empowering and strengthening the relationship between tenants and Islington Council.

3.23.2. **Islington Housing Association Partnership Agreement** produced a Housing Association Partnership agreement with our Registered Social Landlords. This is to link housing association providers in Islington and Islington Council in partnership to facilitate local delivery on key strategic themes. This partnership agreement also

provides corporate leadership as a strategic housing authority in delivering the 'Islington Housing Strategy.' (Appendix 4)

- 3.23.3. **Private Rented Sector Charter created** to provide a high quality, low carbon, affordable and sustainable offer so that Islington's residents have an excellent choice of quality homes in clean, safe, and vibrant neighbourhoods and landlords meet their obligations to their tenants. Its key objectives are: Improve Property and Management Standards, Increase Opportunities within the Sector for Low Income Households, and Improve Communication across the Sector. (Appendix 5)
- 3.23.4. During the final quarter of 2022 the council conducted 22 community drop-in sessions across Islington to discuss the cost-of-living crisis, the District Heating consultation, mould and damp, financial inclusion etc and over 4,700 tenants and leaseholders were invited to these drop-in sessions. These community drop-in sessions were attended by officers and Directors in the Homes and Neighbourhood service.
- 3.24. In November 2022 Islington Council accelerated its response to damp and mould in the wake of the tragic death of Awaab Ishak due to damp and mould in his family's home. Awaab died in December 2020. The coroner's verdict published on the 16th of November 2022 concluded that Awaab had died from prolonged exposure to mould in his home environment.
- 3.25. Two serious cases of damp and mould in Islington Council managed properties were publicised in the national media on the 27th of November 2022 and advocated by housing activist Kwajo Tweneboa.
- 3.25.1. Property one: The household was contacted on Sunday the 27th of November 2022, and the issue of a leaking room was rectified later that same week.
- 3.25.2. Property two: The household was contacted on Sunday the 27th of November 2022; temporary accommodation was offered, and the tenants were moved two days after the report in the national media. We are in regular weekly contact with the household to find suitable property for their permanent move. The family have since been offered 2 x 4-bedroom properties; both have been refused by the household.
- 3.26. The Government has tabled amendments to the Social Housing Regulation Bill to introduce 'Awaab's Law,' which will require landlords to fix reported health hazards within specified timeframes.⁷ This will be subject to a separate consultation with Local Housing Authorities and Housing Associations later this year.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-deliver-awaabs-law>

3.27. **Housing Ombudsman (HO)**

3.28. The Housing Ombudsman found four cases of maladministration in our response to damp and mould complaints between 2021/22, which has led to a special investigation into our handling of damp and mould complaints. The investigation will run for six months from January 2023. Below outlines the detail of these four cases:

3.28.1. **Case 1:**

Outcome: There was **maladministration** in the landlord's handling of the reports of damp and leaks **in the communal area (hallway)** of the property, and **service failure** in its response to the subsequent formal complaint.

The complaint: The resident has described a continued roof leak, affecting the communal hallway, following repairs. The resident stated that this has resulted in the inner wall in the communal hallway of the property being damp which they consider needs treating. The resident states that every time it rains, the leak worsens. The resident states that despite their attempts to raise their concerns with the landlord that they go unaddressed.

Action taken: Compensation paid

Write to the resident, copying in the Ombudsman, setting out the actions that the landlord will now take to identify and repair any outstanding roof leak, and address the damp wall (in the communal hallway). It should provide a time limit for these actions to be completed, which should be no later than 12 weeks from the date of this report.

Wrote to resident on 22 October 2021 confirming compensation was paid and confirming an appointment arranged for 1 November 2021 to identify any outstanding works.

HO response: The landlord dealt appropriately with the reports of a roof leak in March and October 2019. There is no indication of the resident raising concerns about any outstanding works to a damp wall at these times. Some errors were made with booking appointments following on from the March 2020 report, but the landlord has appropriately apologised for these and offered compensation. However, there was a lack of communication about the March 2020 repair, and this third attempt at rectifying the roof leak did not resolve it. The matter remains outstanding to date (Sep 21). In addition, the resident's concerns about damp from August 2020 were not appropriately addressed in a reasonable period, which the formal complaint response did not identify or resolve. Again, this issue remains outstanding (as of Sep 21).

3.28.2. **Case 2:**

Outcome: There was **maladministration** by the landlord in respect of the complaint about how the landlord handled the residents reports of repairs needed in the

property, primarily to address damp and mould, and a repair to the immersion heater.

The complaint:

The resident complains about how the landlord handled their reports of repairs needed in the property, primarily to address damp and mould, and a repair to the immersion heater.

Action taken: Compensation paid.

The landlord to offer to meet with, or arrange a telephone call with, the resident and any relevant support person, to discuss the current situation including the options for decanting the resident so that repairs can be completed. The landlord to report back to the Ombudsman and the resident with its action plan, to ensure that repairs are completed within a reasonable time, within six weeks of the date of this Order.

The landlord to re-consider whether an electrical safety test is required given the surveyor's recommendation of 6 November 2019 and the landlord to confirm to the resident and the Ombudsman its position in relation to this with any reasons within six weeks of the date of this Order.

HO response: There is evidence that repairs were reported by the resident on 28 October 2019 and have not been satisfactorily completed to date (a period of two years). There were periods where the delay was not due to any failure by the landlord, that is:

- a. A short delay following the cancellation of the appointment of 20 March 2020 while the resident was self-isolating.
- b. A short delay following the no access appointment of 3 August 2020.

While it is acknowledged that the landlord acted appropriately in acknowledging its shortcomings and offering compensation, the compensation was not proportionate to the distress and inconvenience cause to the resident by the delays in the repairs and it was not in accordance with its own compensation guidance. In addition, the landlord failed to follow up its offer during the mediation process and has confirmed that the works remain outstanding to date.

There were significant delays in the landlord completing repairs in the property. This caused considerable distress and inconvenience to the resident who informed the resident that they were sleeping in the living room and suffered from ill health. The landlord took some steps to put things right during the Ombudsman's mediation process by offering to complete the works and offering compensation. However, the compensation was not proportionate to the distress caused to the resident and the landlord failed to follow up this offer by completing the repairs for several months after the offer was made.

3.28.3.

Case 3:

Outcome: There was **maladministration** in the landlord's handling of the resident's report of damp and mould in their property.

The complaint: The complaint is about the landlord's handling of the resident's report of damp and mould in their property.

Action taken: Compensation paid. A meeting was held between the Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) team and the Repairs service to review learning and processes regarding the sharing of information. As a result of this meeting, we have identified issues relating to a lack of clarity regarding TMO and council repairs obligations and the handover of works. A further meeting has been arranged between the TMO team and the Housing Repairs Service Manager on 21/06 to review TMO/council repairs processes and to put a written process in place to support staff.

HO response: The landlord has acknowledged significant service failure and provided redress for those failures on 6 April 2021. However, since that date, the landlord has failed to carry out the necessary repairs to the balcony of the neighbouring flat and remains in breach of its repairing obligations.

3.28.4.

Case 4

Outcome:

- a. **Maladministration** in respect of the landlord's handling of persistent damp and mould issues at the property.
- b. No maladministration in respect of the landlord's handling of various other repairs to the property.
- c. **Service failure** in respect of the landlord's complaint handling.

The complaint:

- a. The landlord's handling of persistent damp and mould issues at the property;
- b. The landlord's handling of various other repairs to the property;
- c. The landlord's complaint handling.

HO response: The landlord failed to implement a surveyor's recommendation to complete mould treatment works within an appropriate timescale. No evidence was seen to show the works were ever completed and an avoidable delay of around 17 months appears to have occurred. The resident experienced distress and inconvenience during this time.

In relation to the other reported repairs, the landlord demonstrated a high level of engagement throughout the timeline. Multiple reported issues were considered over several surveyor's reports. No evidence was seen to show the landlord failed to

respond appropriately to any reported issues. Nor to show it failed to respond to any repairs it was obliged to rectify in line with the tenancy conditions.

The landlord's stage one response included information which had been superseded. Because the information it relied on was no longer correct, the landlord missed an opportunity to address any issues with its handling of the damp and mould through its complaints process. It also treated the resident unfairly by declining to fully investigate based on the incorrect information.

3.29. Learning outcomes from review of these cases were:

- 3.29.1. Complex case call overs should prevent the delays in resolving case
- 3.29.2. Formation of team to case manage complex works will improve communications
- 3.29.3. Regular call over of leak actions to prevent delays and escalate access or other delays
- 3.29.4. Moving mould wash to beginning of process would remove nuisance while repairs and investigation underway
- 3.29.5. Improved diagnostic training
- 3.29.6. All staff trained to improve empathy and safeguarding
- 3.29.7. Tenancy visits would now pick up distress and recommend options such as decant or support
- 3.29.8. Increasing use of landlord's access powers to ensure compliance with orders and abatement of nuisance

4. Damp, condensation, and mould programme overview

4.1. Five-point plan

- 4.1.1. Reviewing all damp and mould cases from the last three years - contacting tenants to make sure issues are resolved, and taking more action if needed
- 4.1.2. Investing an extra £1million every year for a new damp and mould action team, including specialist surveyors and more funding for ventilation and insulation
- 4.1.3. Training non-specialist staff - for example staff carrying out gas compliance checks - to identify damp and mould when visiting homes
- 4.1.4. Managing a dedicated line for calls from council tenants concerned about damp and mould, so the council can book a survey and tackle the damp

4.1.5. Working more closely with other local partner agencies to give joined-up help and support to residents including finance, housing needs, medical conditions and repairs

4.2. Strategic and operational response

4.2.1. Designed framework in collaboration with partnership services setting out our approach to damp condensation and mould and communicating our zero-tolerance approach to interventions. Partnership services include: housing services (property services, housing needs, tenancy services, customer services, rehousing), strategy Children's Social Services, Children's Early Help services (Bright Start), Children Looked After services, Islington Safeguarding Children Partnership Board, Adult Social Care, Environmental Health, Partners for Islington (PFI provider), Legal services, Energy Services, NHS (community matron, CYP services, designated doctor for safeguarding, complaints services leads, Public Health, corporate communications, and commissioned construction services.

The framework (Appendix 6) sets out three categories to respond to this approach:

- **Urgent** – immediate response
- **Tenancy and property audit** – proactive interventions
- **Every Visit Counts** – comprehensive approach

4.2.2. In November 2022 and January 2023, we held two partnership roundtable meetings. Attendees include leads from: housing services (property services, housing needs, tenancy services, customer services, rehousing), strategy Children's Social Services, Children's Early Help services (Bright Start), Children Looked After services, Islington Safeguarding Children's Board, Adult Social Care, Environmental Health, Partners for Islington (PFI provider), Legal services, Energy Services, NHS (community matron, CYP services, designated doctor for safeguarding, complaints services leads, Public Health, corporate communications, Hospital's, GP's and commissioned construction services. The below outlines what was discussed.

- Discussed draft Damp, Condensation and Mould Framework, how we intend to approach the programme
- Designing a referral framework for all partners to make direct referrals to Islington Council's Homes and Neighbourhood service relating to Damp and Mould for all Islington Council managed properties, Housing Association homes, and private rented sector properties.
- Discussion on identifying vulnerabilities, support needs and how to share information. To be data-led and informed through a combination of datasets. NHS shared expert advice on health factors that can be adversely affected by damp and mould.

- Sharing good practice and existing tools to identify risk and processes. Coordinating services to support programme e.g., safeguarding board
- Sharing feedback on experience of referral pathways, what would make them better and opportunities to notice damp and mould in properties.
- Shared recent discussions with other housing providers and benchmarking.
- Discussed active review underway of related complaints and Member Enquires.
- Highlighted equality, diversity, and inclusion – ensuring we engage in an appropriate way relevant to the resident and household, and their experiences.
- Seeing an increase in reports of damp and mould.
- Opportunities and challenges for temporary accommodation and rehousing.
- Monitoring communications and reports of damp and mould.

4.2.3. Adopting and communicating our zero tolerance to damp and mould interventions. Directors and programme leads have attended various meetings across council services, partnership boards and local authority joint meetings to share this message and briefings on the programme. Meetings include:

- **Islington Housing Association Group meetings.** This meeting is for all Islington housing association providers to discuss relevant updates and issues.
- **Action Learning Group London Councils** Corporate Director for Housing attended forum to share best practice and work in development across LA landlords.
- **Islington’s Housing Scrutiny Committee**
- **Housing ‘drop-in’ evening session to all elected Councillors** this included officers from property and tenancy services and all departments and provided ward Councillors with information on work underway on damp and mould and an opportunity to ask questions and highlight casework.
- Housing Directors for Westminster, Camden, Haringey, Barnet, Enfield, and Islington met to discuss a sub-regional approach to damp and mould and a special meeting has been arranged to focus on damp and mould on the 20th of February 2023.
- **London Councils Chief Executives group** meeting on damp and mould including landlord obligations, legal advice, public and environmental health.

- Damp and mould presented at **Housing Service Improvement Board**, which is a wider improvement board with all Housing managers. Framework, Tenancy and Property Audit tool, update on activities and One View demo. Housing Quality Network officers attended Board and provided feedback on approach and documents as our critical friend.
- **Islington Safeguarding Children Partnership Board**, Islington Safeguarding Children Partnership (ISCP) is a multi-agency body responsible for ensuring that agencies work well together to safeguard and protect children and young people from harm and improve their welfare and well-being.

4.3. Urgent response

- 4.3.1. Review of all live and historic cases of reported damp and mould since January 2020 – December 2022 to ensure proper diagnosis and remediation has been conducted - 4510 reports for 3472 properties. To guide this work, we are using a Power BI dashboard that is pulling data from various sources: Housing Property Services, tenancy services and complaints, to identify priority and risk of cases and buildings. It provides a single view of damp and mould reports which is directing the proactive telephone calls.

This work continues: Internal staff have contacted the top 100 cases with the highest risk, and we have commissioned an external company, Kwest, to telephone call the existing households. Since 6th February 2023, when Kwest began, they have made 532 calls, contacting 190 households of which 124 households report to still experience an issue with damp and mould.

The qualitative feedback suggests there have been recurring problems with mould with the issues returning following previous works, as well as ongoing works already known to the team, of which there are 114 outstanding work orders raised. Kwest have reduced the number of calls they are carrying out to ensure the current levels of work can be managed and completed accordingly. The visualisations in this dashboard will help with upcoming activity for proactive programme of targeted interventions to whole buildings to identify issues in other properties that have not reported e.g., where buildings have a high number of reports of damp and mould. The dashboard continues to be refined and we are currently working with our Information Governance team to match Adult Social Care and Children's Social Services data.

- 4.3.2. Receiving and procuring support from experts on our approach and activity, including Housing Quality Network, Kwest, damp and mould and building specialist and UCL (University College London).
- 4.3.3. Partnership engagement and joint working to critically review current processes and share experiences with households living with damp, condensation, and mould in

their homes. This includes agreeing to joint approaches, how to use data better, building relationships and opportunities to work together to identify hidden issues and unknown cases of damp and mould.

- 4.3.4. Reviewing resources, staffing and equipment to put in place appropriate action to treat damp and mould, identifying improvements, and training requirements and areas for investment.
- 4.3.5. Improving systems to effectively track cases through from reporting to resolution.
- 4.3.6. Updating our processes and policies and taking a person-centred approach.
- 4.3.7. Damp and mould awareness, customer care and technical training is being delivered.
- 4.3.8. All properties are now checked for Damp and Mould during the mutual exchange and transfer processes and action taken where necessary.
- 4.3.9. Considering the Housing Ombudsman findings, the council has re-organised the customer complaints and the elected members enquiries teams. Therefore, from the 1st of March 2023, the Homes and Neighbourhoods service will have one single team addressing all stage One complaints and responding to all elected members enquiries. This team will be managed within the Housing Operations service. Combing the Property Services complaints and members enquiry team within the existing team located in the Housing Operations service will provide a resident focussed seamless service offer.
- 4.3.10. Islington Council has also organised a “Meet the Housing Ombudsman” event for the 30th of March 2023. Publicity material will be delivered with the Rent Increase letters to all Islington Council tenants promoting this event. This event although hosted by Islington Council will be led by the Housing Ombudsman
- 4.3.11. The council have also appointed the Housing Quality Network to act as a critical friend in this area of the council’s work.

4.4. Tenancy and property audit

- 4.4.1. Building a programme of annual visits to tenants' households which enables officers to effectively identify and report damp and mould in properties, working with social services to understand known support needs prior to visit, identify occupancy levels, any potential housing fraud activity, tenants requiring financial support, communication needs and preferences, and wider health and wellbeing. These visits will commence in March 2023, and ensure all Islington Council tenants are visited in their home by the Housing Operations service.

4.4.2. Designing a Tenancy Audit and Property Condition assessment form based on benchmarking and feedback from housing staff and our partners. Have received feedback from Housing, social services, NHS, Public Health, Environmental Health:

- Make the form shorter and visit more effective through sharing information and pre-populating fields with known information prior to visit.
- Working with social services to ensure we ask appropriate questions that are not intrusive, triggering or asking the household to re-share their experiences or information unnecessarily.
- Making the process digital that can update existing databases, robust referral processes and using tools to support this e.g., digital forms and tablets.
- Pilot the visit to understand time, response, and process. Using the information captured to support residents, understand disproportionality, improve process and services.

4.5. **Taskforce casework board**

4.5.1. As set out in the Terms of Reference, leads from relevant services meeting twice a week to discuss high priority cases related to damp and mould, providing an overview, setting actions and tracking progress.

4.5.2. At the time of this report, the board has 102 cases within its remit, although these are at various stages.

4.5.3. In respect of the two highest profile cases, one has now been fully resolved to the satisfaction of the resident. A second family remains in temporary accommodation, pending a move to a suitable alternative home.

4.5.4. There are currently 31 current legal cases, which are at various stages of the legal process.

4.5.5. Of 16 open Stage 2 complaints relating to damp and mould, 8 have now been resolved to the satisfaction of residents, subject to a 3-month check. Of the remaining 8 cases, 6 have remedial work scheduled, with a further 2 cases are likely to be escalated to access injunction.

4.5.6. Of 14 Housing Ombudsman cases within the boards remit, 6 have now been resolved to the satisfaction of residents, with works in progress and/or arranged in the remaining 8 cases.

4.5.7. The remaining 39 cases are closed, but the learning from these is informing the current work of the casework board. A full review of these closed cases will also inform future Council policy and process where appropriate.

4.6. Alternative housing provision for tenants living with damp and mould in their homes

- 4.6.1. Housing Property Services, tenancy services and re-housing leads drafting new process for allocating properties.
- 4.6.2. Identifying challenges and opportunities based on current damp and mould reports and surveys within the context of re-housing demand, priority of risk and the housing Allocations Policy.

4.7. Housing Ombudsman investigation

- 4.7.1. We have met with the Chief Executive of the Housing Ombudsman and other senior officers to discuss the investigation process.
- 4.7.2. An overview document with a chronology of activity, learning so far, planned activity and a supporting appendix, with relevant documents, to outline context and evidence our damp and mould programme has been submitted to the Housing Ombudsman.
- 4.7.3. The investigation is underway.

4.8. Partnership work and whole systems approach

- 4.8.1. Partnership engagement and joint working to critically review current processes and share experiences with households living with damp, condensation, and mould in their homes. This includes agreeing to joint approaches, how to use data better, building relationships and opportunities to work together to identify hidden issues and unknown cases of damp and mould.
- 4.8.2. Services include leads from: housing services (property services, housing needs, tenancy services, customer services, rehousing), strategy Children's Social Services, Children's Early Help services (Bright Start), Children Looked After services, Islington Safeguarding Children's Board, Adult Social Care, Environmental Health, Partners for Islington (PFI provider), Legal services, Energy Services, NHS (community matron, CYP services, designated doctor for safeguarding, complaints services leads, Public Health, corporate communications, and commissioned construction services.
- 4.8.3. Establishing forums and boards that bring services in Islington together has been hugely beneficial. We have designed and all signed up to a framework, discussed and shared learning from our experiences working with each other and supporting residents. It has also facilitated useful discussions on how to share information better and design pathways to report damp and mould and access services more effectively.

4.9. **Draft Housing Allocations Policy** – on **20th January 2023** opened for consultation for 8 weeks ending on the 17th of March 2023. Additions to Policy related to damp and mould:

- **“Welfare category A** is an award of **150 points** which may be awarded to applicants whose welfare needs are so severe that the protection of vulnerable adults or children is only possible in a permanent home and where the present housing circumstances could deteriorate to such an extent as to place household members, particularly children, at risk or in need of residential care unless permanent housing is offered. These points should only be awarded where housing or the domestic situation severely affects the welfare of the applicant. In general, this very high award will rarely be made. If too many households receive this high award, it will slow down the rehousing of the most vulnerable people. Examples of this include Where a property is declared unfit for habitation or has a category 1 hazard due to damp and mould, as confirmed by the Public Protection team, or Islington Diagnostic Surveyors and which has a severe impact on the household.”
- **“Welfare Category B** is an award of **80 points** and may be awarded in the following serious circumstances: The applicant is living in such insanitary conditions that their welfare is prejudiced, and there are no remedies available to improve the conditions including where there is damp and mould.”
- **“Welfare Category C** is an award of **40 points** may be awarded to applicants whose welfare needs are moderate and comparable to the following: The applicant is living in such conditions that their welfare is prejudiced for example, where there is mould and condensation and limited remedies are available, to resolve the issue.”

As at the 25th of February 2023, 70.7% of residents agree with the proposed changes to the housing allocations scheme changes and 21% of people do not agree with the proposed changes with 8% having no views. In addition to this 6.1% of partners do not agree with the proposed housing allocations scheme changes.

4.10. **Communication and engagement strategies with residents**

- 4.10.1. The community drop-in sessions as mentioned previously in this report.
- 4.10.2. We have reviewed and updated our website and updated our damp and mould leaflet to empower and support residents to report Damp and Mould and to ensure the council provides a service to its residents that is the best in the country.
- 4.10.3. Dedicated email and telephone option to report damp and mould have been set up.
- 4.10.4. We have translation services available when tenants first language is not English to ensure are addressing the needs of all our residents.

4.10.5. Engagement with residents has been more productive and actions more targeted and focussed on getting the best possible outcome for the household experiencing damp and mould.

4.11. **Training**

4.11.1. Damp and mould awareness training delivered to Housing Direct (call centre) and Customer Services (Housing Property Services Complaints Team). In 2023 this training will be rolled out to wider housing services i.e., Housing Needs and Tenancy.

4.11.2. Painter and decorators & LBI (London Borough of Islington) Contractors: Looking at causes of damp and mould, hazards, processes to remove using MGC products & guidelines. How to prevent reoccurrence. Emphasis on not blaming the residents' lifestyle

4.11.3. Repairs Co-ordinators, Customer Service Team, Team Leaders & Chargehands: How to identify diverse types of damp and mould. How it spreads, health impacts, how to remove. Emphasis on not blaming the residents' lifestyle. Look at useful questions to ask the residents on the phone

4.11.4. Void Surveyors: Damp: Condensation, damp, and mould – causes, cures, and the courts | Housing Quality Network (hqnetwork.co.uk)

4.11.5. Surveying Team: Online Training a Diagnostic Approach to Understanding Condensation and Mould.

4.11.6. In the process of commissioning building and damp and mould expert to provide training for both technical and general staff.

4.11.7. Customer care and positive conversations training will be delivered in March 2023.

4.11.8. Temporary and permanent rehousing. We are ensuring tenancy, rehousing and property services are joined up in their communication with households who are being moved due to damp and mould.

4.12. **Data-led and using technology to support approach**

4.12.1. We quickly established a Power BI dashboard within the first week of accelerating our response to damp and mould.

4.12.2. This allowed us to pull together and automate the reporting of data that is held on separate Housing databases.

- 4.12.3. It has helped understand contacts being made to different services, household composition, vulnerabilities, overcrowding and support needs of tenants.
- 4.12.4. As a single view of cases, we can use Power BI's functionality to calculate priority and risk, as well as visualise what buildings have a higher number of reports, which helps our understanding of blocks that have inherent structural issues that can be contributing to damp, condensation, and mould.
- 4.12.5. We will also use this as we roll out our programme of activity, targeting buildings to reach residents who may be experiencing damp and mould in their homes but not reporting it.
- 4.12.6. It has also reinforced the importance of crucial information capture and governance, making sure we think long term about recording data in the appropriate place, against the relevant system code and capturing what is important to track activities and outcomes.

4.13. **Benchmarking and sharing good practice**

- 4.13.1. We are learning a lot from our colleague from different local authorities, housing providers and associations. We are sharing our approaches, challenges, and what technology we are using/piloting.

5. **Service demand and investment**

- 5.1.1. The numbers outlined below show the increase in demand for Damp and Mould Surveys:

2023: **1041 (first 1 and a half months)**
2022: **3658**
2021: **3187**
2020: **2473**
2019: **2702**
2018: **3090**

- 5.1.2. This increased demand has impacted services including legal, tenancy, complaints, and temporary accommodation. We let approximately 1000 properties a year, 50% of this stock is studio or one beds. The number of family sized properties is significantly less, and we rely on temporary accommodation for urgent decants.
- 5.1.3. The total cost for temporary accommodation for Mould/Damp for January is £39,363.56.
- 5.1.4. We have had an additional £1million funding every year and this year it will go towards additional staff, technical protective equipment, and external expert support to critically review the service and deliver training.

5.1.5. **Improvement works and installations**

- Agreed installing/upgrades:
 - Positive Input Ventilation system (PIV): **24**
 - New insulation to walls/ceilings: **15**
- Previous 12 months:
 - Positive Input Ventilation system (PIV): **6**
 - New insulation to walls/ceilings: **2**

5.2. **Challenges**

- 5.2.1. **Increased reports and service demand.** We are responding to this challenge by all front-line staff are being trained through a trauma informed approach and all front-line staff are having training on identifying damp and mould. We wish to walk in the shoes of our residents. Also, by, improving referral pathways, improving information sharing and working with partners, identifying opportunities for early interventions, and sourcing external expert advice to critically review our approach and services.
- 5.2.2. **Recruitment of surveyors.** We are responding to this challenge by upskilling existing surveyors and improving processes, continuous recruitment activity and discussing with other local authorities and housing providers to gather learning on their approach to this challenge.
- 5.2.3. **Sourcing damp and mould treatment.** We are responding to this challenge by liaising directly with our suppliers on the products they provide us and them providing our teams with training on best practice in applying the treatment.
- 5.2.4. **Adapting existing databases to support activity.** We are responding to this challenge by using other tools like Power BI to extract data and making changes to codes to reflect activity, and the referral framework from all statutory partners to prioritise our work.
- 5.2.5. **Financial pressures.** We are responding to this challenge through investing £1 million and redirecting strategic staff to support the management of our response.
- 5.2.6. **Number of available properties for permanent moves.** We are responding to this challenge by redesigning processes and exploring new ways to manage void stock.
- 5.2.7. **Access to properties.** We are responding to this challenge by establishing casework board to discuss cases and how best to contact tenants. We are also updating our Access Procedure.

6. Upcoming activity

- 6.1. **Meet the Housing Ombudsman 30th March 2023 Council Chamber:** Islington Council has volunteered to host a meet the Housing Ombudsman event to allow the Housing Ombudsman to explain to the tenants of Islington Council the work of the Housing Ombudsman and to allow tenants to ask questions directly to the Chief Executive of the Housing Ombudsman. Please note Islington Council is the first London Council to participate in this work.
- 6.2. Meeting and training plan developed to wider staffing group, which includes housing officers and social services, on HHSRS category 1 and category 2 health hazards.
- 6.3. A special meeting has been arranged Housing Directors for Westminster, Camden, Haringey, Barnet, Enfield, and Islington to focus on damp and mould.
- 6.4. Policy and procedure designed and signed off for alternative housing provision for tenants living with damp and mould.
- 6.5. Revised Access Procedure signed off and in place.
- 6.6. Housing Property Service training schedule continues.
- 6.7. Recruitment to additional Housing Property Services staff including surveyors.
- 6.8. Continue to develop research project with UCL. Scope for project: Academic input and review of damp techniques and processes to ensure the most up to date and rigorous systems are adopted. Reusing Net Zero Carbon data to prepare funding/investment bids targeting damp and Net Zero Carbon.
- 6.9. Tenancy and Property Audit and programme of annual visits process finalised and ready to begin pilot.
- 6.10. Every Visit Counts process is implemented.
- 6.11. Customer care and positive conversations training begins.
- 6.12. Housing Allocations Policy consultation concludes.
- 6.13. Technique's training and systems being reviewed by HQN/UCL and industry experts. (TBC April Target for UCL and Board set up).
- 6.14. Piloting the use of automated tracking systems and equipment.
- 6.15. Housing Ombudsman investigation concludes.

- 6.16. Incorporating the Environmental Health response to damp and mould in the private rented sector into the Damp Condensation and Mould Delivery Programme

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. This report sets out the importance of taking a proactive, resident focused approach to dealing with damp and mould. Key elements of an effective approach include:
 - 7.1.1. Undertake proactive assessments of stock condition, taking a data-informed, risk-based approach to prioritise focus on properties particularly susceptible to damp and mould.
 - 7.1.2. Train all staff to identify and respond to damp and mould – see every home visit as an opportunity to identify issues.
 - 7.1.3. Encourage tenants to report damp and mould – share communications on the risks of living with damp and mould and make sure tenants have clear, simple methods of reporting relevant issues.
 - 7.1.4. Respond promptly to reports of damp and mould.
 - 7.1.5. Undertake an assessment of the property to identify the root cause of the issue – staff must be adequately trained and have the correct equipment for this.
 - 7.1.6. Treat the problem – the response will vary depending on severity, but always focus on resolving the root cause. This can include giving tenants sensitive advice on how to minimise the build-up of excess moisture and reduce the risk of condensation, without blaming the issue on lifestyle factors.
 - 7.1.7. Follow up – check that steps taken have resolved the issue. If not, take further action until the issue is resolved.
 - 7.1.8. Record all actions taken and ensure this data can be linked through to other information about the property, the household and previous repair works.
 - 7.1.9. If the case escalates to a complaint or disrepair claim, continue taking all possible steps to resolve the issue.
 - 7.1.10. Learn from past cases – improve processes where needed and consider which property types may need further proactive work to prevent damp and mould. Throughout all stages there must be clear, prompt communication with tenants, a focus on skills and professionalism, and a customer focused organisational culture.

8. Appendix

1. Project Evaluation Report – Housing Ombudsman Report
2. Tenants Charter
3. Tenant Empowerment framework
4. Islington Housing Association Partnership Agreement
5. Private Rented Sector Charter
6. Damp, condensation, and mould framework